Landry-Deron, Isabelle (ed.): *La Chine des Ming et de Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). Le premier dialogue des savoirs avec l'Europe*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf/ Institut Ricci, 2013, 242 pp., ISBN 978-2-20409-617-1.

Reviewed by **Rui Magone,** University of Lisbon, Lisboa, Portugal. E-mail: maguorui@gmail.com

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La Chine des Ming et de Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), carefully edited by Isabelle Landry-Deron, who is best known for her seminal monograph on Jesuit historiography of China,[1] contains the proceedings of an international conference that took place in May 2010 at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of Matteo Ricci's death. The book's structure is identical to the one adopted for the conference, consisting of the three main sections: "Quelle Chine? Quels Réseaux?" (pp. 15–71), which is thematically focused on Ricci's personal networks in China; "L'expérience des autres religions" (pp. 73–145), which is concerned with Ricci's perspective on Chinese religious beliefs; and "Échanges scientifiques" (pp. 147–209), which is devoted to Ricci's scientific impact in China. Preceded by an "Introduction" authored by the editor (pp. 7–14), its content consists of a total of 13 chapters, including two contributions, authored by Jean Dhombres and Pierre Léna, that were not part of the 2010 conference program. These additional chapters have a somewhat paratextual status, not only because of their position at the main text's very end, which makes them look like postscripts to the book under review, but rather because they were in fact written by non-sinologists who happen to be luminary figures in the French scientific community. Their presence provides the volume with a somewhat glamorous patina that does not affect the main text's sinological substance too much, even though Pierre Léna's text, "La science, un pont entre les cultures" (pp. 203–209), is clearly off the topic as it is less focused on Ricci and Ming China than on presenting the international work of the French "Main à la pâte" foundation, which aims at improving the quality of science and technology teaching in primary and middle schools. Another paratextual decision made by the editor was to drop the title originally used for the conference, namely "L'échange des savoirs entre la Chine et l'Europe au temps de Matteo Ricci (1552–1610)", and rename its proceedings in a way that better reflects the volume's content (specifically the many contributions that are not primarily

1 Landry-Deron 2002.

concerned with the scientific exchange between Ricci and the Ming literati elites), while being broad enough as to attract both expert readers and less specialized audiences. In other words, this is not just the proceedings of a conference on Ricci and his times. Rather, it is a full-fledged mainstream publication in which known content has been paratextually revised, also by adding an extensive "Bibliographie" (pp. 211–224), an "Index des noms de personnes" (pp. 225–229) and an elegant cover featuring a portrait of Matteo Ricci sitting with his friend Xu Guangqi (1562–1633) in a highly stylized literati setting. As such, it is part of the historical series issued by Éditions du Cerf, a highly productive and popular Catholic publishing house whose range of interests revolves around religious topics, in particular the history of Christianity.

The book's topic is obviously not new. Since the publication of Henri Bernard's *Le Père Mathieu Ricci et la société chinoise de son temps (1552–1610)* (Tianjin: Hautes Études, 1939) a lot has been written about this subject. And unavoidably, also in an attempt to reach readers other than just specialists, this volume reiterates a lot of our received and frequently repeated knowledge about Ricci. But it does so in an interesting manner by making palpable why Ricci's encounter with China is still such a rich and captivating historical narrative worth being told over and over again. There is, first of all, the thrill of adventure. For someone born in a peripheral mid-sized town in Italy to travel all the way from Europe to the heart of the vast Chinese empire was by no means a small achievement in the sixteenth century. True, compared with his most famous predecessor Marco Polo (ca. 1254–1324), Ricci's mode of traveling was fairly institutionalized. He voyaged within the Jesuit networks that were logistically supported by the Portuguese Padroado. Yet, as Isaia Iannaccone shows in his short contribution carrying the suggestive title "Le voyage de Matteo Ricci et des jésuites en Chine. Science, typhons, pirates, naufrages, maladies" (pp. 149–153), these voyages were far from safe. The ships connecting Lisbon with China via Goa were slow and fragile vehicles of transportation, and as such exposed to all sorts of dangers, both from within (scurvy and other health hazards, insufficient navigation skills) and without (uncharted rock formations, unpredictable weather conditions, pirate attacks). In the space of a few pages, Iannaccone, digesting previous scholarship on this topic, succeeds in conveying to his readers the precariousness of Ricci's long voyage to Asia aboard the São Luís. In spite of the many dangers involved, Ricci survived the long trip to China, where the actual adventure began for him. His first main challenge was linguistic. Unlike modern foreigners who can rely on legions of Chinese language teaching courses and materials in all kinds of formats, Ricci had to literally start from scratch since little to almost nothing was known about the Chinese language back then. In other words, while trying to learn Chinese, he was also

observing it from the perspective of a proto-linguist. In her illuminating contribution, "La connaissance de la langue et de l'écriture chinoises au XVI^{e} siècle en Europe", Viviane Alleton discusses Ricci´s reflections on the Chinese language using as her main source the French version of Nicolas Trigault's (1577–1628) edition of Ricci's notes about China.[2] Her chapter shows that Ricci did not just learn and describe the Chinese language. In fact, over the years his knowledge of Chinese became so impressively solid that he was able, with the assistance of stylistically high-skilled Ming literati, to create a fairly large number of neologisms that are still used actively in modern Chinese. His excellent command of Mandarin allowed him to interact with the Ming elites at ease and, moreover, on a very high level. As a result, he succeeded in establishing powerful networks based on which he was able to ultimately gain access to the Forbidden City. This long "ascent" to Beijing, which started out in the peripheral Zhaoqing in Guangdong Province and took decades to complete, is elegantly retold by Michel Cartier in his contribution "Le statut de Matteo Ricci en Chine" (pp. 17–27). But Cartier does more than just that. He draws in fact attention to one paradox that is right at the core of the Ricci saga: despite his rapidly growing success and notoriety, Ricci always had a formally rather insecure and brittle status during the many decades he spent in Ming China. To a certain extent, he was like a refugee, tolerated and later on appreciated on Chinese soil, but never sure if and how long he could stay in the land of his choice. However, this did not deter him from keeping on doing what he had come to do in the first place.

What is especially captivating about Ricci's missionary career in China – and the book under review is very good at making this aspect palpable – is that it led to a cultural encounter of the highest order, in which, unlike in the undeniably more violent nineteenth and twentieth centuries, two civilizations approached each other via the pen rather than the sword. True, Iberian schemes to conquer the Middle Kingdom militarily did exist, at least on paper, but this early modern phase of Sino-Western relations was primarily a peaceful one. Besides adventurism, this is indeed one aspect that makes the Ricci saga so appealing, especially to those living in our conflict-ridden age of globalization. In her very accessible overview chapter, "Les activités scientifiques de Matteo Ricci en Chine" (pp. 169–183), Claudia von Collani shows the extent to which Ricci's peaceful approach relied in fact on his large literary production in Chinese. His many publications, a large part of which revolved around scientific topics, circulated in the empire, thus reaching a considerable number of readers,

2 Ricci/Trigault 1978.

some of whom, intrigued by the novelty of European ideas wanted to know more and hence felt the urge to write directly to Ricci or to visit him and engage with him in face-to-face conversations. But not all of these European ideas found resonance in China, as Jean-Claude Martzloff discusses in his contribution "Pourquoi avoir traduit Euclide en chinois. La raison d'un choix et ses conséquences" (pp. 155–168). According to him, Ricci's project to translate Euclid's *Elements* was motivated less by a scientific than a metaphysical agenda. As Ricci had learned from Christophorus Clavius (1538–1612), his famous teacher at the Collegium Romanum, the mathematical disciplines edified the soul and allowed the spirit to aptly contemplate divine objects. In short, geometry, especially its demonstrative side, gave access to the Truth. By contrast, from a Chinese perspective, as Martzloff convincingly shows, Euclid's demonstrations and their metaphysical implications were deemed both irrelevant and obscure, and, later on, in the nineteenth century, appropriated as an inferior variant of indigenous ideas that originated in Chinese antiquity. To what extent, then, did Ricci's scientific and other activities have a transformative impact on the intellectual landscape of late imperial China? Thierry Meynard's stimulating contribution, "Ricci et les intellectuels chinois aujourd'hui" (pp. 107–131), presents different responses to this question as they were elaborated by three leading Chinese intellectuals, all born in the 1950s. Did the Ming *Weltanschauung* diverge from European epistemic traditions in such a radical fashion that it could not process what Ricci and the Jesuits had to offer it intellectually, as Ge Zhaoguang contends? Or did it absorb some of these new ideas in order to establish a new tradition, i. e., Confucian monotheism, as Zhang Xiaolin argues? Or was it the other way round, as Li Tiangang suggests: had Catholicism in its late sixteenth century Jesuit version became universal enough in its outlook as to be absorbable by any culture without causing any significant cultural tensions? None of these responses is conclusive, of course, but they all reveal the strong impact that Ricci's legacy has had on modern Chinese historiography.

La Chine des Ming et de Matteo Ricci provides its readers with more than just a good sense of the Ricci saga, thus allowing them, especially those new to the topic, to discover for themselves why Ricci's biography and what he has achieved in China remain a source of fascination for experts and lay audiences alike. Rather, it also shows how sophisticated this field of research has become compared to the first half of the twentieth century when Henri Bernard wrote his then groundbreaking book on Ricci. Since then archival materials extant in Rome, Lisbon, Goa, Macao, and Beijing have become much more accessible to scholars, partly also as digital resources, and the field as such has turned into a still sizeable yet highly productive industry with experts from different areas of

knowledge exploring Ricci's life and achievements from various perspectives. Based on their findings, it has become possible to magnify any aspect of Ricci's career one wishes to know more about. Frédéric Wang's contribution "Matteo Ricci et les lettrés de Nankin" (pp. 29–42) is paradigmatic of this development. Focused on the fifteen crucial months that Ricci spent in Nanjing at the turn from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, Wang immerses his readers in the complex world of Ming literati culture. Not only does he manage to get us acquainted with Ricci's most important contacts during these months, he also brings the many figures involved into context while highlighting the relevance of Wang Yangming's (1472–1529) legacy to the Confucian networks Ricci was trying to plug into in Nanjing. A similar inner, i. e., Chinese rather than Jesuit, perspective on Ricci is provided by Shenwen Li in his chapter "Les deux voyages de Matteo Ricci à Pékin. Gagner la capitale de l'empire céleste" (pp. 43–58). While making palpable the xenophobic atmosphere the Ming empire was shrouded in at that time, Li succeeds in zooming in all the way onto the Forbidden City, to the pompous imperial audience Ricci was invited to and which the emperor, weary of state affairs, declined to attend. The zooming function is also applied by Noël Golvers in his brilliant article "La 'bibliothèque' occidentale de Matteo Ricci à Pékin. Quelques observations critiques" (pp. 133–145), which tries to reconstruct the collection of books that Ricci had at its disposal in Beijing, especially when he was composing his many treatises on various topics, ranging from astronomy to mnemotechnics. Golvers makes an important distinction between texts that were materially available to Ricci, on the one hand, and his so-called "patrimoine de lecture", on the other hand, i. e., all the texts that were within his reach because he could access them physically, had systematic excerpts therefrom (commonly known as *adversaria*), or had incorporated them into his memory via studious reading. This approach to Ricci's mind is definitely less flamboyant than the one used by Jonathan D. Spence, who in his bestselling *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984) created the impression that Ricci was a living library with a memory as vivid as Funes, the infamous Borgesian character who could not forget anything he had read or experienced.[3] The sober evidence painstakingly gathered by Golvers does not necessarily question Ricci's formidable memory, but it gives us a more realistic sense of how the Jesuit worked as an author, specifically how he accessed the great amounts of knowledge he needed for his prolific literary production.

3 Borges 1944.

The book under review does not only zero in on Ricci and his career in China. It also pans out to look at him and the Jesuit mission from a bird's-eye perspective. Françoise Aubin's contribution "Au-delà de l'Empire chinois. Les bouleversements dans l'Asie intérieure au temps de Matteo Ricci" (pp. 75–88) gives us an impressive *grand tour* of what was going in Central Asia in Ricci's time and the extent to which this impacted China proper, including the Jesuit mission. Her chapter infuses historical energy into our rather static images of late imperial China while making palpable the degree to which the Ming empire's vast territory was in fact brittle and fragile. To a certain extent, the contribution by Jean Dhombres, "Comment analyser l'échange des savoirs entre la Chine et l'Europe au temps de Matteo Ricci?" (pp. 185–201) also allows us to zoom out of the very limited and rather linear view we tend to have of the cultural transfer that took place between Europe and China via the Jesuit mission. Complementing Martzloff's chapter on Ricci's translation of the *Elements*, Dhombres sketches out the complex evolution of geometrical traditions in Europe before and after the publication of the influential commentary to the *Elements* by Clavius, showing that the epistemic culture the Jesuits introduced in China was far from being static and uniform.

While looking at its main protagonist from a close range as well as from a more panoramic perspective, the book under review also tries to make visible, albeit to a much lesser extent, some of the historiographical filters that have been used in the making of the Ricci saga. Most notable in this aspect is Zvi Ben-Dor Benite's contribution "Ricci et les 'musulmans de Canton'. A propos du premier dialogue des jésuites avec l'Europe" (pp. 89–106), which basically traces back a short remark made by Ricci on Muslims in Guangzhou all the way from its original text to the version revamped by Trigault for his aforementioned edition of Ricci's notes on China, thus making palpable the qualitative differences between first-hand sources and illustrious publications with a propagandistic agenda. This chapter is philology at its best, revealing a brilliant hermeneutical mind attempting to prove that Ricci's disparaging words about Muslims in that particular note were actually a veiled critique of Portuguese colonialism. Ben-Dor Benite's interpretation may be valid, but it does not seem to be entirely unaffected by historiographical preferences – most salient in Spence's *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* – which tend to portray the Jesuit Ricci as an enlightened man of the Renaissance, i. e., erudite, rational and critical. This image tends to phase out one crucial aspect – arguably the driving force – in Ricci's life: religion. In fact, Ricci's faith in God and the impact it had on his everyday life in China is something that is altogether missing in the book under review. If we choose to count in religion, a somewhat different, less suave Ricci tends to emerge from the extant sources, at least occasionally. In his recent

biography of the Jesuit, Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia provides us with a glimpse of the religiously zealous Ricci literally shouting at his Buddhist opponent Abbott Xuelang Hong'en at a banquet that took place in Nanjing in 1599.[4] And even though Hsia himself tends to portray Ricci as level-headed and rational, it becomes clear from his account of Ricci's life that the Jesuit was a strictly observant practitioner of Catholicism who believed in signs of divine favor and the miraculous.[5] In fact, Ricci's double persona as religious missionary and scientific popularizer embodied a conflict that emerged already in the beginning years of the Jesuit mission to China. It revolved around the question as to what extent religion was expendable in relation to science, the one aspect of Jesuit culture the emperor and the elites in Ming China felt most attracted to. This conflict, as was extensively shown by Liam Brockey in his *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), became an overtly nationalistic one when in 1685 the authority of the Portuguese Padroado, until then the only official logistical sponsor of the Jesuit mission to China, was challenged by the king of France Louis XIV, who sent six mathematically highly trained French Jesuits directly to China on the grounds that they were scientifically more advanced than any Jesuit who could reach China via the usual Padroado channels. Considering this legacy, it is perhaps no great surprise that modern historiography has tended to favor the 'scientific' rather than the 'religious' Ricci. It was the former who laid the foundation for what turned the Jesuit mission into a success story that is appealing to our modern world, namely science. In this kind of historiographical operation, Ricci's anti-Lusitanian sentiments underscore his rational outlook, including his disdain for the parochial, irrational and ultimately religious dimension of the Jesuit China mission.

Interestingly, the manner in which *La Chine des Ming et de Matteo Ricci* is organized encourages its audiences to read the Ricci narrative mainly as a success story. Its contributions approach Ricci from a perspective that knows and advertises the outcome of the long adventure which started out in little Macerata and culminated in the glorious Forbidden City. Less palpable, by contrast, is the sense of failure underlying this seemingly perfect narrative. It seems that the most efficient way to provide this perspective is to stick as much as possible to the chronology of events. This could be the main reason why Ronnie Hsia's biography of Ricci succeeds in capturing any reader's attention. It assumes the viewpoint of Ricci as a human agent who moves forward in

4 Hsia 2010: 194–198.

5 See e. g. Hsia 2010: 255–256.

time without any knowledge about his future. Through this perspective we understand much better the contingencies of Ricci's intellectual development, in particular the extent to which inventiveness and improvisation, failure and despair were an integral part of his everyday life in the many decades he spent in Ming China. This applies to his career as scientific author as well. Not everything Ricci wrote was as successful as the translation of Euclid's *Elements* he completed with Xu Guangqi. In fact, the *Qiankun tiyi* (On the structure of Heaven and Earth), Ricci's 1608 Chinese adaptation of *In Sphaeram Ioannis de Sacro Bosco Commentarius* compiled by his teacher Clavius in 1570, even though it was later included in the prestigious late eighteenth century *Siku quanshu*-collection, turned out to be a fiasco. But this translation effort was not entirely in vain. It resulted in a text published in 1615 that was much shorter and more accessible than Ricci's rather indigestible work, namely the *Tianwen lüe* (Epitome of Questions on Heaven) authored by Manuel Dias, Jr. (1574–1659) and a substantial team of palace examination graduates. Obviously, failure and success derived not just from a single individual's efforts. Rather, they had a collective dimension, based on which the Jesuits were able to develop and refine their proselytizing strategies in China, both on a macro- and micro-level. To give but one single yet significant example: Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607), who arrived in Guangdong Province before Ricci, was naïve and somewhat erratic in his efforts as Jesuit missionary in Ming China. Moreover, nobody could understand his heavily accentuated spoken Chinese. But it was by observing and assessing Ruggieri's achievements and many mistakes that the Jesuit mission was able to correct its initial course while realizing that solid Chinese language skills were an indispensable tool for networking with the Ming literati elites.[6]

It goes without saying that *La Chine des Ming et de Matteo Ricci's* kaleidoscopic rather than linear approach to its subject is fascinatingly diverse and informative. But this publication is definitely less apt at conveying the unidirectional and shaky vision of human agency than the recent conventionally chronological biographies by Ronnie Hsia or Michele Fontana.[7] Moreover, as a scholarly publication with an agenda that is focused on celebrating – in close collaboration with the Jesuit Institut Ricci of Paris – the 400th anniversary of Ricci's death, it is naturally more concerned with the Jesuit's achievements than his setbacks, thus inadvertently shrouding its main protagonist in a thin yet tenacious veil of hagiography.

6 See chapter 5 of Hsia 2010, which provides an excellent treatment of this Jesuit missionary.
7 Fontana 2010.

To sum up, the book under review does not excel at newness. But it digests wonderfully for French reading audiences the most recent and important research findings in the internationally fast expanding field of Ricci studies. It provides multiple and fascinating perspectives on Ricci's career in China, using both microhistorical and synoptic registers. Even though it does not entirely succeed in penetrating or at least making visible the many historiographical agendas that have shaped our images of Ricci and his missionary activities in China, it is nevertheless an important publication, also because it aims at sharing expert knowledge with a rather heterogeneous lay readership in a manner that is similar to Ricci, who – as we know, also through this publication – did not say much that was new. His expertise rather lay in trimming and framing it differently so as to be able to persuasively reach new and often quite challenging audiences.

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